

Church and Society in Post-Reformation Scotland

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The Reformation in Scotland has been viewed in many ways, but one of those which has been least explored has been the effect of the events of 1559/60 on society.

In theory little change was effected as, both before and after 1560, Church and society were seen acting in concert.¹ Nevertheless, while at certain levels in the pre-Reformation period, it can be demonstrated that there was no sharp division between Church life on one hand and social and economic life on the other, this impingement had little effect on the workings of the Church itself. In the later middle ages in synods and other ecclesiastical bodies the laity, with the exception of the occasional clerk or lawyer engaged in his professional duties, were apparently excluded, and even if present had no vote.² Only in a few peripheral areas was an exception made to this general rule. The election of a parish clerk, which in some cases lay with the local landowners is a case in point,³ while those who retained the right to present to benefices within the Church could indirectly exert some influence over it. As, however, the great bulk of patronage, until the advent of the secular commendators, lay with the Churchmen themselves, the influence of the laity was necessarily restricted.

This failure of identification was not confined to organisation and administration, however, as the same traits can also be seen in the act of worship itself. The statutes of the Scottish Church attest to the difficulties of communicating the word of God through the medium of a priest whose educational standard was frequently not much greater than that of his largely illiterate congregation.⁴ Even where this was not true, the use of Latin

¹ D. McKay, "Parish Life in Scotland, 1500-1560" in *Essays on the Scottish Reformation*, ed. D. McRoberts, Glasgow, 1962, p. 85; D. Shaw, *The General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1964, p. 21.

² Ibid., p. 95; D. Patrick, *Statutes of the Scottish Church*, (Scottish History Society, 1907), pp. xli-ii.

³ D. McKay, "The Election of Parish Clerks in Medieval Scotland", in *Innes Review*, xviii, pp. 25-35.

⁴ Patrick, *Statutes*, pp. 157, 172-3 and 176-7.

must have constituted a barrier between laity and priesthood. The Church in Scotland was not unaware of this but when efforts were made to allay it by issuing Archbishop Hamilton's Catechism, written in our vulgar Scottish tongue, in 1552 and a "Godlie Exhortation" on the Eucharist in 1559,¹ the attempt came too late to re-engage the loyalty of the laity in the affairs of the Medieval Church. As a result, indifference was a cardinal feature of the Reformation in Scotland and passivity as much as hostility may have allowed a vocal and committed minority to encompass a Protestant Reformation.

This minority although at odds with the Catholic Church on many issues had no quarrel with their predecessor's conception of the Church's place in society, but in the Reformed Kirk, theory was to be translated into practice. The participation of the laity in ecclesiastical affairs was to be one of the most prominent features of the Church of Scotland, and in carrying this into operation not only the Church but society also was to be transformed.²

The concept of lay participation in the workings of the Church stemmed from the top to the very bottom of the social structure. At the top there was the monarch—the Godly Prince,³ while at the bottom, the claims of the inarticulate majority were recognised in the First Book of Discipline in the statement that "it apperteneth to the pepill, and to everie severall congregatioun to elect thair Minister".⁴

As it turned out, and for very different reasons, neither of these wishes were to be realised. In the case of the "Godly Prince", Mary's Catholicism proved to be an insurmountable obstacle, and before that problem had been solved the claims for division of Church and State were sufficiently strong to prevent its implementation. Foiled in their early attempt to involve the sovereign in the workings of the Church, the Reformers had turned to the Privy Council by whose presence they hoped, in the absence of a sovereign, to complete the membership of the General Assembly.⁵ Once again they were frustrated in their hopes for while Privy Councillors often attended the early Assemblies, the Council seldom attended as such and never did so after the deposition of Mary.⁶ The impact of the nobility on the Church and of the Kirk upon them was thus left very much to each individual lord.

¹ T. G. Law, *Catechism of John Hamilton*, Oxford, 1884; Patrick, *Statutes*, pp. 188-190.

² J. Knox, *Works*, ed. D. Laing, Edinburgh, 1846-64, ii, pp. 233-7.

³ Scots Confession of Faith, chap. xxiv, "Of the Civil Magistrate", in Knox, *Works*, ii, pp. 118-119.

⁴ Knox, *Works*, ii, p. 189.

⁵ Shaw, *General Assemblies*, pp. 41-2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-8.

This impact cannot be readily assessed. The events of the Reformation had been encompassed by the Lords of the Congregation, and while it can be argued that many of the nobility who joined the Congregation had ulterior motives for so doing, a considerable number may also have had the welfare of the Reformed Church at heart. The evidence is conflicting. On one hand is the failure to ratify the First Book of Discipline or to eject the old possessors of benefices many of whom were related to the lords themselves. Secular interest certainly came to the fore in such a situation, and showed itself likewise in a reluctance to disgorge teinds which properly belonged to the Kirk. Nevertheless, many of the offenders are to be found in attendance at early Assemblies.¹ Their practical assistance was also frequently forthcoming as in 1563 when the Earl of Glencairn was requested to visit, along with the superintendent of the West, the hospital of Glasgow in order to enquire into its financial state.² As representatives of the Assembly, the nobility possessed obvious advantages, and numerous examples including the delegation led by Andrew, Lord Ochiltree in 1569,³ could be used to illustrate this point. The concern of the nobility as individuals is best demonstrated, however, by the fact that once the attempt was abandoned in 1576 of incorporating the nobility as an estate within the Assembly, many nobles continued to attend, not as elders or commissioners, but as individuals who were actively involved in the affairs of the Kirk.⁴ This involvement obviously extended to the localities controlled by the lords, but at this level they seldom intervened directly by personally sitting in the lesser courts of the Church.⁵ Thus, while members of the nobility are on occasions found as elders and members of their respective kirk session, as is Lord Ruthven in 1572, this was the exception rather than the rule.⁶

This absence of the lords cannot, however, be taken as constituting a lack of interest, nor can it be assumed that failure to participate in the courts of the Church weakened the lords' influence over them. The position of a prominent landowner *vis-a-vis* his tenants who often constituted the majority of the elders on a session was sufficient to assure this, while the election of elders may frequently have conformed to the lord's wishes. Privileges could certainly be obtained as a result of such influence as is demonstrated

¹ *Acts and Proceedings of the General Assemblies of the Kirk of Scotland, from the year MDLX*, (Bannatyne Club, 1839-45) (hereafter referred to as BUK), pp. 41, 49, 77.

² BUK, i, p. 44.

³ Ibid., i, pp. 164-5.

⁴ Shaw, *General Assemblies*, pp. 71-74.

⁵ This is evident from an examination of the Kirk session registers of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

⁶ BUK, i, p. 256. Ruthven is described as "ane speciall one of the elders".

in the case of Lord Mar who, being absent in London on the Sunday in 1614 on which communion had been administered in his parish church of Alloa, was able to obtain permission for another communion service a week later.¹

The most certain way of directing Church affairs at a local level lay not through influence over the session, however, but rather through control of the minister. In achieving this the lords were pre-eminently successful. The wish expressed in the First Book of Discipline that each congregation should elect its own minister met with no success,² and the decree of the Second Book of Discipline which would have placed election in the hands of the elders and reduced the congregation's rights to one of veto, was similarly overlooked.³ Instead, patronage was retained and the erection of temporal lordships from the old abbey lands ensured that presentation to a large number of livings lay with the new lords. Royal and episcopal patronage was equally extensive and as the King and his bishops consistently presented ministers in sympathy with their own ideas, the ecclesiastical leaning of the lords was to be one of the most important factors in creating a stable ecclesiastical situation. Generally speaking, until Charles I alienated the nobility, the ministers presented by such patrons during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries tended to support episcopacy and the King's religious policies. The nobilities' hold over the ministers and through them over presbyteries whose membership until 1638 was almost exclusively ministerial⁴ was such that patronage survived the implementation of other presbyterian reforms in that period. Not until 1649, with the nobilities' political power shattered following the defeat of the Engagers at Preston, was patronage to be abolished and the Church to free itself from a system which it had condemned since the Reformation.⁵

At other levels this control was equally complete for in the ecclesiastical fields in which neither King nor nobility were interested the social classes immediately beneath them in rank and influence took their appointed places. This can be most easily established by an examination of the eldership whose members until at least 1638, and sometimes later, remained as conceived by the First Book of Discipline as members of the laity elected to their office,

¹ Reg. of Kirk Session of Stirling in *Maitland Club Miscellany*, i, pp. 452-3.

² Knox, *Works*, ii, p. 189

³ D. Calderwood, *The true history of the Church of Scotland*, ed. T. Thomson and D. Laing (Wodrow Society, 1842-9), iii, p. 534.

⁴ W. R. Foster, "The Operation of Presbyteries in Scotland 1600-1638", in *Recs. Scot. Church Hist. Soc.*, xv, pp. 22-3.

⁵ *The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, edd. T. Thomson and C. Innes (Edinburgh, 1814-75), vi, ii, pp. 261-2.

rather than ecclesiastical figures appointed for life, as envisaged by the Second Book of Discipline.¹

The composition of the St Andrews Kirk Session between 1559 and 1600 admirably demonstrates this point, for while a considerable proportion of the elders within this period cannot be positively identified, lairds, if numerically understrength, appear to have enjoyed a pre-eminent position.² Tenants and guildsmen seem to have been fairly equally represented while a considerable percentage also came from the University,³ but this representation apart St Andrews appears to have been fairly typical of other towns in which the division of power invariably falls between lairds and guildsmen. The lairds' influence which was paramount in rural parishes thus extends to most of the burghs, and may have been further enhanced by their ability to influence burgh electors. Moreover, while in theory elders were elected, selection rather than election seems to have been nearer the mark, the only part being played by the congregation as a whole lying in a right of objection to the nominees. Thus at Elgin in 1593 "the minister maid nominatioun of the names of all the eldaris that ar to be chosin publictlie upoun Sondaye nixt in presens of the hail auditoris for this yeir . . . quho desyrit to undirstand gif thair wes ony occasioun lauchfull to be schawin quhy thei nocht beir that office and nathing being proponit or opponit in the contrar the minister proceidit to the nominatioun of the deacones".⁴ The clearest indication of the closed nature of the session and the almost unchanging composition thereof comes, however, from St Andrews in 1595 when the election proceeded thus:—

"Maister Androw Meluill, Rectour of the Universite, and remanent membris thair of, quha wer elderis this last yeir being removit, the hail remanent sessioun remaning be voting electit elderis of thame that wes removit, quhilk being done, thai enterit agane in sessioun; and eftir four or fyve utheris personis elderis being also removit, the remanent sessioun be voting electit of thame that wes removit elderis; and safurth successive, four or fyve brethering elderis and deaconis being removit, the remanent sessioun remaning electit and chusit elderis and deaconis, quhill the hail number of the brethering passit throche. And thaireftir the hail brethering of sessioun being to

¹ Knox, *Works*, ii, p. 234; Calderwood, *History*, iii, pp. 537-8; Foster "Operation of Presbyteries", pp. 22-3.

² This is based on an examination of the lists of elders in *Register of Kirk Session of St Andrews*, ed. D. H. Fleming (Scottish History Society, 1889-90). The lists for 1593 and 1595 typify this, *ibid.*, pp. 760, 802.

³ *Ibid.*, xxiii, pp. 412 and 427.

⁴ *The Records of Elgin*, ed. W. Cramond and S. Rec (New Spalding Club, 1903-08), ii, p. 32.

gidder at ane tyme, the personis nominat of new to stand in electioun being red in presens of the haill sessioun, the sessioun be voting electit elderis and deaconis to be adjoinit with the rest new electit, to stand for this yeir in to cum.”¹

In some respects there is a close parallel to the election of town councils at which by rather similar methods continuity of personnel was ensured. Aberdeen provides an other example in 1605. Here the elders and deacons of the session were “nominat and chosin be the sessioun of the yeir preceding” and having undergone public censure they accepted office and gave their oaths “for faithfull administratioun of thair offices for the yeir to cum”.²

This influence of the lairds is in some respects hardly surprising for as a social class they had figured prominently in the early years of the Reformation movement. Among many of the first professors of the Reformed faith in Scotland were lairds and their attendance at the Reformation parliament had been one of the notable features of that meeting.³ Thereafter, they were equally prominent in the General Assemblies of the Kirk, the records of which attest to the uses which were found for them.⁴ Thus three lairds are found in a body appointed to petition the Privy Council in 1561,⁵ while in 1565 of a body of five appointed to petition the Queen, four of them were lairds.⁶ In the same year, three lairds of Carnell, Sornbeg and Dreghorne undertook to provide stipends at Riccarton and Dundonald and other examples illustrating the committment of men of this class to the Reformed Church could be easily accumulated.⁷ Their position in the Assembly was, however, open to doubt. At first they appear to have attended because they were committed to the cause of Reformation and while on occasions they may have represented Reformed congregations or certain areas, more often or not they represented no one but themselves.⁸ While this was feasible in the Assembly, a similar attitude to attendance at Parliament brought to the fore the need to regularise and regulate the attendance of these barons and abortive moves towards parliamentary representation in 1567 appear to have led to an Assembly Act of 1568 which established the procedure for election of commissioners of shires.⁹ At first the appointment of such

¹ *St Andrews Kirk Session Reg.*, pp. 801-2.

² *Selections from Ecclesiastical Records of Aberdeen* (Spalding Club, 1846), p. 47.

³ G. Donaldson, *Scotland, James V- James VII*, Edinburgh, 1965, p. 278.

⁴ *BUK*, i, pp. 38, 71 and 83; Shaw, *General Assemblies*, pp. 107-112.

⁵ *Ibid.*, i, p. 10.

⁶ *BUK*, i, p. 60.

⁷ *Ibid.*, i, p. 61.

⁸ Shaw, *General Assemblies*, p. 108.

⁹ *Acts Parl. Scot.*, iii, p. 40; *BUK*, i, p. 124.

commissioners made little difference to the position of the barons who continued with the nobility to attend as of right. In their case, however, the prescription did not last so long and by the early 1580s only those who were appointed commissioners were able to take their place in the Assembly.¹ Constitutional recognition in actuality thus weakened the position of the lairds in the supreme court of the Church and this may have been further encompassed by an Assembly decree of 1598 which gave presbyteries, in which ministers alone were to be found, the right to select the shire commissioners.²

The barons certainly continued to have considerable influence in the kirk session, and a few lairds also possessed patronage rights, but these were of relative unimportance compared to the patronage at the command of the nobility. If the importance of the lairds was diminished their zeal for the faith was no less. Resistance to the Five Articles was noticeable amongst the lairds,³ and when it came to the Covenant, the influence of this class became progressively greater in the deliberations of the Kirk as presbyteries began to send elders as commissioners to the Assembly.⁴ When the nobilities' power collapsed, albeit temporarily, in 1649, it was this class which came to the fore again, and it is from this self-same class of lairds even after 1660 that the presbyterians were to draw their greatest strength.⁵ This fact cannot be explained in exclusively religious terms as social and economic factors clearly entered in, but religious beliefs nurtured and developed in the post-Reformation period clearly play a significant part in the way in which the lairds reacted to religious change.

For much of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, however, the lairds had to be content with their pre-eminent position on kirk sessions. In these bodies the requirement in the Second Book of Discipline that elders should be "men of judgment and habilitie" tended to be equated with the selection of "men of best social standing", while goodness and judgment became synomous with rank and wealth.⁶ A comparison between those who were elders and those who were deacons of the St Andrews Kirk Session,

¹ Shaw, *General Assemblies*, p. 111.

² BUK, iii, pp. 947-8.

³ According to Calderwood, the voting in Parliament in 1621 by the commissioners of the shires was 19 to 18 against the Articles (Calderwood, *History*, vii, pp. 498-501). It has been argued, however, that the officially recorded vote was 11 to each side, as where two commissioners of a shire voted as one, their vote was recorded as such (David Stevenson, "The Covenanters and the Government of Scotland", Glasgow, Ph.D. thesis, 1970, pp. 860-1).

⁴ R. Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, ed. D. Laing, Edinburgh, 1841-2, i, pp. 469-72.

⁵ The punishments meted out to such lairds is demonstrated in J. K. Hewison, *The Covenanters*, Glasgow, 1913, ii, pp. 323 and 449-50.

⁶ Calderwood, *History*, iii, p. 551.

1559-1600, shows that whereas lairds were prominent among the elders, the diaconate was drawn almost exclusively from guildsmen and tenants.¹ This social distinction between elders and deacons is also exemplified in the holding of civil appointments within the burgh as a considerable number of the elders were baillies while only a handful of deacons aspired to this office.² Thus, although initially deacons and elders were equal in status as members of the session, and deacons could at first fulfil the same duties as elders and even officiate at communion, their office was certainly regarded as socially inferior to that of the eldership, and this was to be further accentuated when the duties of the deacons were gradually restricted to those of administration.³

Even the deacons, however, had a fixed place in society either within the town or the surrounding countryside, and participation in running the affairs of the Kirk was consequently fairly restricted. If the involvement of the laity had gone no further, it might have been arguable that the relationship of the Church to the mass of the populace had scarcely changed at all. That this was not so sprang from the manner in which the Church went about its daily task. The apparent indifference of the pre-Reformation Church was to be replaced by an intense interest in the lives of each individual member of the Church. This concern was admirably conceived in terms of education and care of the poor,⁴ although in the latter the Church's concern was often tempered by other considerations. Stubborn and idle beggars were not to be maintained, while at St Andrews the deserving poor were to be thoroughly examined and catechised before receiving their alms.⁵ Equally important was the concern that morality should be preserved and all transgressors punished for their sins.⁶ Nevertheless, the exercise of discipline in this manner brought an involvement with the Church which has never been surpassed. The moral transgressor may have resented the interference of the session, but even the most intractable and stubborn was made to accept its authority and on occasions even amity could result. Thus at St Andrews in 1596 after James Smyth and John Welvod had declared that "thei had na hetred maleis nor invy againis nane of the memberis of this sessioun nor counsell" those who were present rose up "and with thair hartis foirgave

¹ *St Andrews Kirk Session Reg.*, pp. 454, 608 and 650; Alexander Carstares was one of the few who in turn served as deacon, elder and baillie. *Ibid.*, pp. 369 and 427.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 453, 487 and 511.

³ *Ibid.*, xxiv-xxv, xcvi-xcvii.

⁴ Knox, *Works*, ii, pp. 200-201 and 208-24.

⁵ *St Andrews Kirk Session Reg.*, pp. 824 and 828.

⁶ Knox, *Works*, ii, pp. 227-231.

all men, and tuik every persoun in the session be the hand in feir of God and luif".¹ Moreover, if the Church courts never obtained the statutory powers which they had sought, in towns at least where many of the baillies tended to be elders, the support of the magistrates could be counted upon in cases of exceptional difficulties. Thus at St Andrews in 1569 in the case of two relapsed fornicators, the session "referrit the punition of them to the magestratis" while on another occasion the course of justice was made even speedier by committing an offender into the hands of the baillies present in session "to be civile correckit and punist".² Punishment, moreover, was not always restricted to imprisonment. In 1601 at Elgin, Edward Alcorne and his two sons were committed to the steeple "quhill they be beltit for thair gryt enormiteis and playand at prohane pastymes on the Sabbath the tyme of preaching".³

Participation in this manner was not, however, restricted to those who were deprived of a share in its running. Privilege and position may have been required to obtain a seat in the session, but that position was not always sufficient to defend an offending elder against receiving the same punishment he had so often meted out to others. Thus in 1598 at St Andrews an elder accused of adultery was found unworthy "to bruik the office of eldership" and ordered "to stand in the porch dur bare hedit and bair futtit with seck clothe, betuix the secund and thrid bell, and then on the penitent stule, and to continew during the will of the session".⁴ Sometimes, however, influence does seem to have swayed the issue and the punishment meted out was not so severe as it might otherwise have been. Thus, in December 1585, James Douglas, Provost of Elgin, and also an elder, having been found guilty of fornication "offering himself to obey the censuris and injuncions of the elders menit himself unto thayme that inrespect repentance consistit not in the externall gestour of the bodie or publict place appoynit for the samyn but in the hart of the quhilk he had God and his own conscience giving him witness desyrit to keep his awn place the tyme of preaching and the sermon to compeir befor the minister to declare the confession of his sin and penitent mynd. Quhairfoir the elders efter advysement heiring his guid menyng and hoping alwayis for a better example of him in tymes to come grantit the samin and to declair his uprycht mening ordanit him to repair the North Windok foryain the pulpit sufficientlie with glass qlk the said James acceptit."⁵ Punishment of a kind had nevertheless been imposed and

¹ *St Andrews Kirk Session Reg.*, p. 819.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 141 and 324.

³ *Elgin Records*, ii, p. 90.

⁴ *St Andrews Kirk Session Reg.*, p. 866.

⁵ *Elgin Records*, ii, p. 4.

in this respect elders and deacons were also constantly subject to the censure of their fellows at the privy-censuring.¹ In the early days of the Reformation this censuring was effected at a congregational meeting held for this purpose. In 1566 the communicants of the Canongate parish were given such an opportunity, the minister, elders and deacons submitting themselves to "the judgmentis of thair brethern and the censors of the Kirk".² Likewise in Aberdeen in 1574 the session ordered the minister to charge "all and sundrie within this toun to compeir on the nixt Assembly day, to try and examin the lyffes of the minister, elders and dyaconis and to lay to thair charge sik thingis as thai knaw to be sklanderous to the Kirk".³ Later, however, such occasions seem to have become restricted to those who were actually members of the session. Nevertheless, judgment seems to have been stringently carried out. A deacon of St Andrews was removed from the session in 1596 because he was "inobedient to the magistrates, and an evill payer of his dettis".⁴ Even ministers could be brought to boot on such occasions and in the same year Robert Zwill, reader at St Andrews was "admonisit of multiplicacione of wordis in his doctrine, and that his nottis be in few wordis, that the people may be mair edifiit".⁵ Ministers, moreover, were obviously aware of their highly critical audience and at Elgin in 1601 at one meeting of the session "the minister speirit gif thair wes any of the session that culd find fault with his doctrein on Sunday last let them declair and tell it now, for he is redie to answer for himself, and all being severallie speirit at answerit in ane voce they found nane, quhairupon the minister desyrit a not thereof be registrat".⁶

If on these occasions contact between the Church and the laity was restricted, wider consultations could and did take place between minister, session and other members of the community. Sometimes these discussions were concerned with discipline. Thus, in Elgin in 1593 the merchants of the town were summoned "and compeirand the minister and eldaris maist earnestlie desyris thame to forbear the Sondagis mercatt quhilk thai continuallie occupy and transgressis the Sabboth thairthrow, staying thame self from heiring of the Word and uthers therfra to the greit dishonour of God and hurt of the saulis of many". The merchants acknowledged their fault and promised not to transgress again.⁷ Sometimes the consultation was more

¹ *St Andrews Kirk Session Reg.*, pp. 815-7, provides a good example.

² *The Buik of the Kirk of the Canagait 1564-1567*, ed. A. Calderwood (Scottish Record Society, 1961).

³ *Aberdeen Ecclesiastical Recs.*, p. 16.

⁴ *St Andrews Kirk Session Reg.*, p. 822.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 816.

⁶ *Elgin Records*, ii, p. 95.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

general. The date which communion could be most conveniently held was another consideration of the session at Elgin in 1593 and hence "it was concludit that the greatest number of honest men within the toun suld be summoned agane the nixt Frydaye the allewint of this instant to gift thair opinion in respect of the busie tyme of yeir twtching the communioun and materiallis."¹

An ecclesiastical revival was thus encompassed. At an organisational and disciplinary level, the populace, whether it be on the stool of the repentance on which baillie, guildsmen, merchant and occasionally even a member of the nobility might find himself with the lowest sinner, or in fixing the date of communion, had become involved in the affairs of the Church. This involvement was not restricted to discipline and organisation, however, but included something much more central to the Church's purpose—namely the worship of God.

Divine service was to be conducted on week days as well as on Sundays when both forenoon and afternoon were devoted to worship, the second session being reserved for the teaching of the catechism.² Attendance at such services was to be compulsory, and while inevitably even elders at times preferred the golf course to the Kirk,³ and compulsion had on many occasions to be backed up by assistance from the baillies or as at Perth by the Dean of Guild,⁴ it is not the backsliding which should engage our attention but the enthusiasm for church-going which materialised as the sixteenth century progressed. Thus at St Andrews in 1600 it was recorded that upon the "Saboth day aftir nune, in this somer seasoun, the peopill convenis sud frequentlie to preaching that the Kirk may nocht convenientlie contene thame" and consequently other arrangements had to be made for additional services⁵. This attendance, it can be argued, stemmed from a fear of the session and the stool of repentance, but other evidence to the same end can be adduced, one of the most impressive being the reception given to John Durie, minister of Edinburgh, on his return to that burgh in 1582 after his previous banishment had been lifted by the King. At the Gallowgreen Durie was met by a crowd of 200, "but ere he came to the Netherbow their number increased to 400, but they were no sooner entered but they increased to 600 or 700, and within short space the whole street was replenished even

¹ Ibid., p. 29.

² Knox, *Works*, ii, pp. 238-9.

³ *St Andrews Kirk Session Reg.*, p. 913.

⁴ Kirk Session Register of Perth in *Spottiswoode Miscellany*, (Spottiswoode Society, 1845), ii, pp. 257-8.

⁵ *St Andrews Kirk Session Reg.*, p. 925. On occasions attendance was less impressive, but the overall position appears to have been good. Ibid., lxxiv-v.

to St Geiles Kirk: the number was esteemed to 2,000. At the Netherbow they took up the 124 Psalme, "*Now Israel may say*", and sung in such a pleasant tune in four parts, known to the most part of the people, that coming up the street all bareheaded till they entered in the Kirk, with such a great sound and majestie, that it moved both themselves and all the huge multitude of the beholders . . . with admiration and astonishment".¹ This was a particular situation, but the enthusiasm and the sincerity behind such a demonstration cannot be doubted, and is a far cry from the activities of the rascal multitude of 1559-60.

Again the keynote is involvement even among the masses and this participation can be seen again in the central act of the Reformed Faith—the communion service. In the pre-Reformation period the partaking of communion had been increasingly restricted to Easter and as a reaction against this the early Reformers advocated more frequent communion.² Practical considerations mitigated against this, but the importance that was reinstilled in the ceremony was one of the major changes achieved at the Reformation. The Reformers, moreover, in their insistence that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was a feast rather than a sacrifice, laid stress upon the corporate action of the participants who received communion sitting around a table.³ Communion was administered in both kinds and in returning the cup to the people, the use of a common cup or cups was again a visible sign of equality between all communicants.⁴ Enthusiasm for the new faith, however, led to scenes which were not approved by sessions such as that at Stirling who took the congregation to task for the "great misordur amongis the pepill of this congregatioun at the last ministratioun of the Lords Supper, in rash and suddon cumming to the tabill, spilling of the wyne, and in thrusting and shouting in thair passage out of the Kirk dur aftir the ministratioun". In future the people were to be "admonishit to use thame selfis mair reverentlie".⁵ This is curiously reminiscent of the plea made in 1559 in the Godlie Exhortation "Thole nocht your parochianaris to cum to this blyssit sacrament misorderlie. But put them in order be your ministeris before the altare, and require tham to heir yaw reid the afore wrytten exhortation, without noysse or din, and to sit styll swa in devotioun, with devote hert and mynde, quhill thay be ordourlie servit of the said blyssit sacrament."⁶ Rash behaviour alone should not be too readily equated with

¹ Calderwood, *History*, viii, p. 226.

² Knox, *Works*, ii, pp. 239-240.

³ *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 187-8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 116.

⁵ Reg. of Kirk Session of Stirling in *Maitland Misc.*, i, pp. 129-130.

⁶ Patrick, *Statutes*, pp. 189-190.

enthusiasm for the Reformed Church, but other evidence does point in this direction. Exclusion from communion was dreaded by most and it was not unknown for those so excluded to adopt desperate measures in order to participate. "Fengyeit tikatis" were not unknown, while on other occasions the kirk had to be searched for intruders who had hidden in the church before the communion service itself.¹ Exclusion had frequently been preceded by excommunication and whereas, before the Reformation, this particular ecclesiastical weapon seems to have become blunted by misuse, the Reformed Kirk managed to reinstil all the former fear which had accompanied it, not only in the world to come, but in the exclusion from the society of man on earth.²

Both facets are clearly seen in a typical sentence of excommunication which not only declares the offender to be "seperated and cuttit of from the congregacion and misticall body of Christ Jesus, and all benefitis of his trew Kirk (the hearying of Goddis Word only except); delivering hym oneto Satham, for the distruction of the flesche, that the spirit may be saved in the daye of the Lord," but also enacts "that nane of the fayfull fearyng God, fra this hour furth, accompany wyth hym in commonyng, talkyn, bying, selling, eating, drynkyn or other way quhatsoever, except thai be appoynted of the Kyrk for his amendment".³ Punishment invariably followed non-compliance with these injunctions and an Elgin elder was made to confess his fault which he rather ingenuously claimed had arisen through accompanying the corpse of the excommunicate person "not altogidder villinglie but rayther accidentlie".⁴ Even close relations were debarred from the company of an excommunicate and in 1604 Arthur Settoun was admonished by the session of Aberdeen that he should not "intercommon with Maister Alexander Settoun, his brother's sone, an excommunicat papist, nor resave him in his house, kep companie, eating or drinking with him in tyme cumming".⁵ Such sentences were fairly common in the sixteenth century, but declined markedly in the seventeenth as first the presbyteries and then the bishops intervened to prevent the indiscriminate use of such a powerful weapon.⁶ Nevertheless, it remained as the ultimate deterrent in a society which had become ecclesiastically reintegrated.

Quite clearly this committment to the Church was a powerful force, one which, if successfully canalised, could effect far-reaching changes. Knox's

¹ *St Andrews Kirk Session Reg.*, p. 379; *Records of Elgin*, ii, p. 121.

² Knox, *Works*, pp. 230-1.

³ *St Andrews Kirk Session Reg.*, pp. 204-5.

⁴ *Elgin Records*, ii, p. 40.

⁵ *Aberdeen Ecclesiastical Recs.*, p. 33.

⁶ W. R. Foster, "Operation of Presbyteries in Scotland", p. 27.

greatest service to the cause of Reformation in Scotland had been to utilise some of that force, then only a shadow of what it was to become and lacking the deeper committment which later generations were to possess. The leaders of ecclesiastical opinion in Scotland were always aware of the social forces at the disposal of the Church and the pattern established in 1559-60 of banding together to effect religious change, or at least to maintain the *status quo* against Catholicism or ecclesiastical innovation, was resorted to on many occasions. Moreover, while banding or bonding for various causes, or the achievement of a desired end, was not new, the religious connotation was an innovation and one which was to be extended as time went on.¹ Hence in 1572 the General Assembly enacted "that ane solempnit band and aith may be maid be all thame that professouris of the Evangell within this realme, to joine thameselffis togidder, and be reddie at all occassiouns for resisting the enemies forsaidis".² The result was sometimes not a formal banding, but an action taken in unison towards some general end, such as the general moral purge in Elgin in 1593. Thus: "Monie of the inhabitantis of the said burgh being convenit within the queir in presens of the minister, baillies and eldaris, thay being inquyrit generallie and be thair names particularlie to consent to reformatioun and purgatioun of the said burgh of all and sindrie viked, sclanderous and unprofitabill memberis of the publict veall thairof, efter inquisitione of the quhilks thay all as ane man in ane voce consentit and aggreit that the said micht be done dilligentlie with exact executioun to the performing whereof they promiseist thair concurrence, fortificatione and assistance."³ More often, however, the enemies were still the Catholics, and the banding of subsequent years was in this self-same pattern. The Negative Confession of 1581 declares that the subscribers "shall continue in the obedience of the doctrine and discipline of this Kyrk" and already demonstrates something of the introspection which was to become even stronger in the seventeenth century. For while the affirmation was made that the only "true Christione fayth and religion, pleasing God . . ." was "receaved, beleved, and defended by manie and sindrie notable Kyrkis and realmes", the phrase "but chiefly by the Kyrk of Scotland" demonstrates a trait which was to become more marked as time went on, while the refutation of error "by the worde of God and Kirk of Scotland" demonstrates a partnership in which for some the voice of God and that of the Kirk were to become synonymous.⁴ The general band of 1590 to which all inhabitants of the Kingdom were expected to subscribe continued this pattern by which the

¹ S. A. Burrell, "The Apocalyptic Vision of the Covenanters" in *Scot. Hist. Rev.*, xliii, p. 12.

² *BUK*, i, p. 254.

³ *Elgin Records*, ii, p. 33.

⁴ *BUK*, ii, pp. 515-8.

Scottish custom of banding began to be infused with a new theological conception.¹ In 1596 during a series of public bandings against the popish lords which had been called for by the General Assembly, the term "covenant" was used to describe such ceremonies for the first time.² The idea of a sacred covenant—a compact between the Scottish people and their God had been born.

Given the opportunity such a concept could prove to be the vehicle by which religious enthusiasm could be utilised to effect the ecclesiastical changes which for some at least were the prelude to the Apocalypse itself. Yet not until 1637 with the signing of the National Covenant did the event for which the necessary conditions were already created by 1600 come about and the Church of Scotland set out not only to perfect its own organisation and beliefs, but also to transmit the received will of God to other less fortunate nations. The question which must be asked is not so much as to why the ecclesiastical revolution should begin at that point but rather why it had been so long delayed? Why did the restoration of apostolic succession to the episcopate or more remarkably the introduction of the Five Articles in 1618³ not spark off an earlier reaction than that experienced in 1637? The answer lies in the attitude of those who controlled the Church. The inarticulate mass possessed the enthusiasm and were committed to their Church, but they must be led and shown the direction in which God was leading them. At a congregational level this could either be achieved by the minister or by the session. The minister however, was usually presented by King, bishop or nobility. The majority of ministers were unlikely to openly oppose the wishes of their patrons on matters of worship and organisation. Most parish ministers were thus willing to accept the established Church, and proof of this is forthcoming in the fact that in the period 1610-25 only 48 ministers were proceeded against by the Court of High Commission, and of these only 21 were eventually punished.⁴ In this respect any body pressing for violent ecclesiastical change, like the Glasgow Assembly of 1638 was almost certain to speak with a minority voice, if the ministers alone are assessed as being representative of parochial feeling. The session was another matter. Opposition to the Five Articles of Perth seems to have been strong in many burghs.⁵ One suspects many lairds and guildsmen

¹ Burrell, "Apocalyptic Vision of the Covenanters", pp. 12-13.

² BUK, ii, p. 862.

³ I. B. Cowan, "The Five Articles of Perth" in *Reformation and Revolution*, ed. D. Shaw, Edinburgh, 1967, pp. 160-177.

⁴ George McMahon, "The Scottish Courts of High Commission 1610-38", in *Recs. Scot. Church Hist. Soc.*, xv, pp. 200-1.

⁵ The voting in Parliament in 1621 by the commissioners of the burghs was 24 to 20 against the Articles (Calderwood, *History*, vii, pp. 498-501).

of the session deeply resented the religious innovations of the early seventeenth century, but so small was their influence in the upper courts of the Church that their expression of disquiet inevitably remained inarticulate. In addition there were other social and economic pressures from above on the lairds who tended to dominate kirk sessions. Unless they could be sure that their actions would not distress the nobility they were unlikely to move too rashly. To ignore the Five Articles was one thing—to openly oppose them was quite another. In 1637, however, the nobility stood aside in order to teach King and bishops a lesson and the way was opened for other classes of society to express their true feelings. It was the intrusion into the General Assembly of large numbers of elders, who obviously felt quite differently on certain issues such as bishops and the Five Articles which tipped the balance in favour of change.¹ The place of such men within the Church up to this juncture had been fairly limited, restricted in their attendance at General Assemblies, they had nevertheless where possible shown their disapproval of ecclesiastical change and had carried this protest in the case of the Five Articles into parliament itself where the voting in 1621 reveals that a large number of the burgh and shire commissioners—the very men who were likely to be elders and members of the session voted against them. The votes in favour came from the bishops and a majority of the nobility—the men who controlled patronage.² In short, ecclesiastical matters were dominated by a very small group within society headed by a King who could manipulate the Assembly when he cared to call it, and increasingly treated his bishops like puppets.³ After 1606 synods had bishops as their constant moderators and presbyteries which only contained ministers also had constant moderators foisted upon them.⁴ Increasingly the control of the Church was made more complete and even though resistance was present and society in general might be unhappy with changes in administration and worship nothing could be done to resist it. Only when the nobility for reasons of their own, some of which were religious but others

¹ Donaldson, *James V to James VII*, pp. 320-1.

² All 11 bishops and four officers of state voted in favour of the Articles. The voting by the nobility was 31 to 15 in favour. The majority of burgh and shire commissioners were against the Articles but, as noted above, the votes of the shire commissioners may have divided equally. If the votes are calculated in the latter fashion the figures in favour of the Articles approximate to those of the Clerk Register, 78 to 51, but if Calderwood's figures are accepted, they appear as 84 to 58 (*Original Letters relating to the Ecclesiastical Affairs of Scotland*, ed. D. Laing, Bannatyne Club, 1869, ii p. 661; Calderwood, *History*, vii, pp. 498-501).

³ Cowan, "Five Articles of Perth", pp. 168-173 and 176-7.

⁴ A. Ian Dunlop, "The Polity of the Scottish Church, 1600-1637", in *Recs. Scot. Church Hist. Soc.*, xii, pp. 167-175; Foster, "Operation of Presbyteries in Scotland", pp. 23-4.

of which were political and economic, decided to oppose the King and saw in the wishes of some kirkmen the best way to achieve their ends, was the system to fall apart. Only when the nobility stood aside and allowed the laity their head did the wave of religious enthusiasm again demonstrate its full force. The eldership became a force to be reckoned with in the courts of the Church and increasingly the laity led the way, transforming themselves in passing into the quasi-spiritual offices envisaged by the Second Book of Discipline.¹ The nobility realising too late the force which they had unleashed managed for a time to retain some semblance of control over the Kirk, the retention of patronage being their most conspicuous success. But this too went by the board in 1649 and for a time Scotland appeared to be heading for theocratic government. Defeat at Dunbar in 1650 brought that experiment to an end, and by the Restoration the nobility had learnt their lesson. To support the government in ecclesiastical matters became a keystone in their policy—patronage returned and for a time it seemed as if the Restoration settlement would be a success. Nevertheless the strength of the covenanting party, and more important still, the more general desire for a return to presbyterian government continued in the small landowners—the lairds, and essentially at a parochial level.²

At first sight the connection between the events of the Restoration period and the effect of the Reformation on various classes of society may seem slight, but a recurring pattern appears so frequently that it cannot be ignored. The attitudes towards the Church which were created amongst various social classes in late sixteenth-century Scotland and the reaction of these classes to their place in that Church are the key to a proper understanding of the religious conflicts of the seventeenth century. In the past too much attention has been paid to the attitudes of the King and his nobility, the bishops and the ministers. At the end of the day all these classes had a vested interest in the retention of the Jacobean settlement of the Church. Despite the opposition which James VI aroused by his own policies, his settlement might have persisted had not the policies of Charles I momentarily shattered this union of interests and allowed the laity represented by the lairds and burgesses, ably abetted by the multitude, to play as decisive a role in the ecclesiastical fluctuations of the seventeenth century as they had played at the Reformation itself.

¹ Calderwood, *History*, iii pp. 537-8; G. Donaldson, *The Scottish Reformation*, Cambridge, 1960, p. 222 and n.

² I. B. Cowan, "The Covenanters" in *Scot. Hist. Rev.*, xlvii, pp. 42-52.

